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III. THE REVOLT OF 1789

1. GROWTH OF THE *BASHO* CONTRACT SYSTEM AND THE CHANGE IN EZO ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The Japanese who came to have an advantageous position over the Ezo after the 1669 incident profited further by the great change in the Ezo industrial system brought about by this very incident. This was due to the growth of the *Basho* contract system for trade previously carried on by the clan or by *Chigyōnushi*, now passed into the hands of merchants called *Basho* contractors. The basis of the Matsumae economy lay in the Ezo-Japanese trade because, unlike other Japanese clans who could rely on agriculture, the Matsumae inhabited a land not suited for agriculture. The clans in Japan were dominated by farmers who had acquired control by force while in Matsumae territory it was the merchants who acquired power by force. But while the Matsumae merchants were superior to the local hunters and fishers in power and ability they were, in comparison with the mainland merchants, merely local small time traders. The mainland market where goods for the Ezo trade were bought and sold was dominated by the merchants of Central Japan. Thus the Matsumae were not go-betweens in the trade between the Ainu and the mainland markets, but just go-betweens in the trade between the Ainu and the mainland merchants. The relationship between the *Chigyōnushi* and the mainland merchants may have started as a commercial one in which goods were bought and sold for the Kyōto-Ōsaka regional market, but as the mainland merchants invested more capital in the trade and as the Central Japan traders began to operate branch offices in Hokkaidō, from the second quarter of the seventeenth century on, the Matsumae clan became dependent upon these merchants. The natives borrowed capital and a year's supply of food from these traders and paid off in whatever game they caught.[1] The *Chigyōnushi* did the same in that they borrowed from the merchants not only necessary capital for the Ezo trade but also the money needed for an entire year's operation and they repaid the merchants from what they earned in the native trade.[2] With the rise in the standard of living of the samurai plus the cunning of the mainland merchants, the *Chigyōnushi's* debts increased until the Ezo trade fell into the hands of these traders from Japan. Under the name of *Basho* contractors they paid a certain sum in taxes or money for the privilege

[1] "People from local areas were eager to borrow any amount of gold, silver, rice, salt, etc., to employ a crew and hire a boat. After the February equinox they would fish and the catch would be sent to the creditors, who, in a body, would price the hauls." *Tōyūki* (Record of a trip to the East).

[2] "Income from the land was not grain or fish but credit from the merchants with whom the price of land use had been set as 100 or 200 kin for a given area. No money changed hands but daily necessities were supplied by the merchants." *Chihoku Gūdan* (The northern allegory).

trout, and other fish were sold not only as food but as fertilizer and shipped to the Kansai markets as oil cake.[30] Abalone had been dried into a product of a dark color with a slight value as merchandise. The contractors made these into dried white sea ear shell for export to Nagasaki.[31] New methods of preparing tangle were introduced into remote areas. These advancements in technique required large capital. The simple tools of the Ezo had been made by themselves or else rented from contractors for a share of the catch. But as the tools improved their manufacture passed beyond the ability of the Ezo, so the Japanese established shops under the supervision of mainlanders who used Ezo labor to make them. In addition, as the contractors expanded the area of their activities, they operated the new fishing grounds by themselves using Ainu labor. The entire expansion of the fishing industry was probably accelerated by two factors, the new market in the Kansai region for oil cake and the use of large nets. Inevitably there arose a change in the economic relationship between the Ezo and the Japanese. Hitherto the Ezo had worked independently of the contractors and had come to the post to trade only his surplus above what he needed for food and clothing. This meant a small scale trade which could only be surmounted by such devices as advancing loans to the natives so that when the Ezo paid for the loans out of their own produce they had also to repay the value of the goods.[32]

On the other hand, the contractors, with their improvements and regulations, made it possible greatly to increase the catch. (The dried sea cucumber trade in the Sōya area is an example of the advanced regulation of production.) During fishing season the Ezo in bands of thirty to fifty would come to the trade post with their chief. Borrowing such things as rice, sake, yeast, tobacco, and tools for taking sea cucumber they would go out fishing. With their boats loaded with sea cucumber they would return to the post where clerks would record the catch. This was to prevent pilfering before the catch was dried and delivered. After being checked in the Ezo would take the catch home, boil them, and skewer them either over a fire or out in the sun after which the sea cucumbers were taken back to the post. There Ezo women worked under foremen taking the sea cucumbers off the skewers and packing them for shipment. The Ezo also were used to load the boats.[33]

The trade between the contractors and the Ezo was not a mere trading process but a system of credit. No longer were the chiefs men of character but merely supervisors for the contractor. Small scale fishing could not be much improved by the use of nets but large scale fishing, i.e. salmon, trout, and herring, was operated by the contractors themselves who were no longer

[30] *Ibid.*, 403, 407.
[31] *Ibid.*, 410.
[32] See chap. 2, para. 3 and para. 4.
[33] *Igen Zokuwa* 1, on catching sea cucumbers.

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Ezo to farm; that they barred the Ezo from using straw sandals and straw hats and that if any Ezo did any of the above he would be accused by an interpreter and punished for the same. However, the above cited were not the generally accepted regulations of the Matsumae. While the *Ezo Sōshi* tells us that, "By law it was forbidden to send seed to the Ezo," there do exist records showing that the Ezo living from Tokachi on the east coast to Ishikari on the west coast had a knowledge of primitive agriculture and that the Matsumae clan itself, perhaps in preparation for famine, a not uncommon event in those days, ordered in May of 1716 that cereals be grown in Ezo. In reference to the ban on the use of the Japanese language both written and spoken we refer again to *Ezo Sōshi:* "From early times it was forbidden to teach the Ezo how to read or write or speak Japanese. Since I broke this rule it was but natural that I was frowned upon by the Matsumae." However, Mogami Tokunai exaggerates this point because there was no such rule set by the Matsumae. During the latter part of this period and according to records made by travelers, there were many Ezo in the vicinity of Matsumae who understood Japanese and even some who could read and write it.

The prohibition against straw hats and sandals has to be considered in the light of changing Ezo customs. There is no evidence that there existed any "Family law of the Matsumae" on this matter.[53] The Ezo themselves preferred not to change their habits and traditions. Their reluctance to do so is shown by their bitter opposition in later years when the Bakufu in an attempt to assimilate them in the shortest possible time attempted to Japanize by fiat. The Ezo had their own set of rules on clothing as set down in the *Hokusui Taimon*, "They had rules not to wear anything on their feet, not to bathe or to bind their knees."

I am therefore not of the opinion that in those days the Matsumae had a calculated policy of suppression although as Japanese power grew their attitude toward the Ezo did become oppressive. I hold that the method of government in those days was to allow self-government by the Ezo in accordance with native custom. This was most probably because Hokkaidō was still in large measure a commercial colony and there was no need to organize the natives and thereby take the risk of losing markets for the sake of political control. It was more profitable to leave the natives in a state of nature so that merchants fully exploited this situation. Many of the oppressive acts recorded as being rules of the Matsumae were, in actuality, regulations set up by merchant contractors for their own benefit. The fault of the Matsumae was that they winked at these actions.

3. THE ABUSES OF THE *BASHO* CONTRACTING SYSTEM AND THE "INCIDENT" OF 1789

The *Basho* system had characteristics similar to those chartered colonial companies which played such an im-

[53] *Hokuto Sanjin Monogatari.*

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portant role prior to the eighteenth century in the development of the European colonial system. Although the *Basho* operators, were individuals operating on a small scale, they played a similar historical role for they were entrepreneurs who succeeded in colonial enterprise after feudal attempts had failed. Furthermore, just as the chartered companies had certain obligations (the payment of a portion of their annual product to the Royal Household) for which they were given certain privileges, so did the contractors oblige themselves to pay a stated amount to the *Chigyōnushi* for which they were given the right of monopoly at the *Basho*. Another point in common is that both chartered company and *Basho* operators were merchants backed up by feudal power. However, unlike the charter company, the *Basho* operators were not granted the power of protecting their own enterprise, only the name of the *Basho* and the fee being entered into the contract. Nevertheless, since the negotiations with the Ezo were left up to the contractors and since neither *Chigyōnushi* nor clan interfered, the contractor actually exercised some political control. In the Sōya, Akkeshi, and Kunashiri districts which were under direct clan control supervisors were sent with each vessel because, says the *Toyu Zakki*, "People from Matsumae would try to deceive the Ezo and start trouble. They were to see that this did not happen." Actually, the main duty of the clan officials was trade supervision. The *Ezo Sōshi* gives their duty as that of preparing those goods which were to be sent to the daimyō: "they would go to the *Basho*, trade for sea otter, hawk feathers and eagle tails which were to be offered to the central government at Edo, load these goods with those of the contractors and sail for home."

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The predominance exercised over the Ezo was confined to *Omusha*, trade for "light goods," the inspection of cargoes, the reading of instructions to chiefs at the *Basho*, and the settlement of disputes between Ezo and Japanese. Privately owned territory, which represented the major portion of Ezo, was never visited by these officials.[54] But just as the chartered companies expanded, improved, and dominated industry in the colonies so did the *Basho*. Just as the companies played an important role in preparing the colonies for the direct rule of the home government so did the *Basho*. Just as companies took advantage of their privileges and caused the spread of misery among the natives, so the *Basho*. Just as the home governments did not interfere with the companies either from intent or because there was nothing that could be done thus leaving the natives to their fate, so with the *Basho*. The *Basho*

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[54] It is said that the *Uwanoriyaku* were sent only to such territories as were directly controlled by the clan chief. This is not true. They were sent to all important areas and this may be checked by the fact that in Bunsei Nenkan Tōzai Ezochi Unjōkin Chō (Tax records of Eastern and Western Ezo during the Bunsei period) there are many *Basho* in West Ezo which are listed under "*Uwanorikin*." In later years no *Uwanori* were actually sent to these *Basho* but the tax was collected.

system brought bitter experiences to the Ezo but it operated to develop the industry of Ezo and it played an important role in the development of Hokkaidō. These contractors were business men taking great risks for profit; using crude vessels; without an adequate knowledge of navigation and dealing with a foreign people. They were speculators and it was but natural for them to try for as much gain as possible on each trip. Since their contracts were signed by those who had power at the time they were obliged to pay not only *Unjōkin*, but also *Goyōkin* and *Kariagekin* [forced loans]. There was also the danger of the contract being unilaterally cancelled by official act and in such an event even though the contractor might win a suit in court he could not gain financial compensation from a government in constant financial difficulties. He stood to lose not only his invested capital but his entire fortune as happened in the cases of Hidaya Kyuhei and Abuya Denbei.[55] Therefore, these possibilities had to be taken into account in the Ezo trade.

The contract system became less important in later years but the chief objective was still profit in trade. Unfair trade provoked the Ezo and led eventually to the 1669 revolt. But there is no evidence that after the suppression of the revolt the system was remedied—indeed it seemed to grow worse. Trade was on a barter basis and "when the Ezo came to the post to trade they would, for example, for 100 sea cucumbers receive 3 cups of sake if they wished *Aburashake* [*Seishu*—refined sake]. One cup was equal to 2 gō 5 shaku. The price for tobacco was 100 dried sea slugs. When they asked for *Yayakan* [earrings] they were given a set of earrings."

In the early trade there was no stable exchange rate. The *Tsugaru Kibun* notes: "Boats sailing to Ezo would return, at times, with ten times worth as much goods as they had taken over but on other occasions would return with not enough goods to cover what they had taken. The Ezo are no more intelligent than our children and the rate of exchange has never been stable." But as the volume and rate of trade increased a sort of customary exchange arose. The exchange rates at Sōya during 1792 are as follows:[56]

For 1 sack of rice containing 8 shō:
- 6 bundles of herring i.e. 200 herring equal 1 bundle.
- 500 sea cucumbers
- 5 bundles of salmon i.e. 20 salmon equal 1 bundle.
- 15–16 bundles of trout i.e. as above with slight annual variations.
- 6 bundles of dried cod i.e. 20 cod equal 1 bundle.
- 3 barrels of dried herring roe i.e. 1 bbl. equal 2 shō.
- *shirako* [a small whitefish] 3 bbls. as above.
- *Sasame* [dried herring gills used as fertilizer] 6 bbls. as above.

[55] Details of the decline of Hidaya are given in *Hokkaidō Shi* 1 (3): chap. 34. Those on the downfall of Denbei are in chap. 44.

[56] *Igen Zokuwō.*

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From the standpoint of an attitude toward the natives, the Matsumae clan took a non-interference policy and was not aggressive while the contract merchants, who were the actual possessors of power, driven by the desire for profit and oblivious to the interest, happiness, or humanity of the Ezo, restricted freedom and established a despotism equivalent to a slave system. And the passivity of the Matsumae was an acknowledgment of this merchant power and attitude. Unlike the colonial history of the West in its early period no such cruel method as extermination was undertaken. The reason for this as explained in Chapter II of Part two may be our national character, the benevolence of Buddhism, and the principles of royal rule derived from China, but fundamentally it was because the Ezo, being a peaceful people, did no harm to the Japanese and were, in fact, vitally necessary to the mainlanders.

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